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Objects and ideas. Japan and Europe in the nineteenth century

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Opening a closed Japan

Starting in the middle of the nineteenth century, great quantities of cultural goods began to flow from Japan to Europe. At the same time, exhibitions were organized and books and magazines published with the aim of making this culture comprehensible to the Europeans. Japan became fashionable in Europe, and the fashion quickly developed into a fascination with this country. As a result, this period in Europe is known as the era of Japan and its culture, as expressed by *Japonisme* and *Japonism*, the new French and English terms coined for this occasion.

These new terms basically referred to art or, in the broader sense, to artistic culture¹. It is possible to speak about two aspects of their meaning. On the one hand there were the internal qualities and artistic and aesthetic values of Japanese art and craftsmanship which were new to the inhabitants of Europe; on the other there was the cultural openness of those who perceived these values, appreciated them, and became fascinated with this new sensitivity. Japanese art, in the form of screens, fans, porcelain, and weapons, strongly influenced European artists, critics, and collectors. Among these items printed or painted *ukiyo-e* attained extraordinary popularity and significance.

Japanese culture was presented in many ways, through various cultural events that captured the imagination of Europeans, including exhibitions, fairs, and international expositions, and shops and galleries of a local character. These were enthusiastically discussed, described, and reviewed, highlighting the novelty and originality of this

¹ Even if its political aspect was equally significant. See Shimamoto, Mayako; Ito, Koji; Sugita, Yoneyuki et. al. *Historical Dictionary of Japanese Foreign Policy*. London: Littlefield Publishers, 2015, p. 81.

culture. These events deeply influenced the public imagination, creating an exotic climate but also accustoming the public to the new phenomenon. All of these factors in combination influenced the creation of a new artistic and aesthetic taste in Europe of this period, contributing to changes in the reciprocal relationships between countries and nations. Regarding phenomena with roots in Japanese sensitivity, it suffices to mention post-impressionism, the Arts and Crafts Movement, and, in a somewhat longer perspective, Art Nouveau or Cubism. Undoubtedly one can speak here of a transcultural phenomenon on a scale which surpassed later manifestations.

In nineteenth-century European-Japanese relations everything was new and “first.” The 1860s saw the first World Fair in London (1862), prepared by Rutherford Alcock, the first English diplomat in Japan, a lover and collector of Japanese art. The first Japanese mission in Europe, led by Takenouchi Yasunori, also visited the Fair. The Japanese part of the exhibition proved to be one of the most important in European culture due to the presentation of Japanese art². This success was perpetuated. Five years later another World Fair (1867) was held in Paris, where Japan presented a broad spectrum of its art at its exhibition pavilion.

One of the most important cultural events of this time was the establishment of the Japanese Native Village in Knightsbridge near London in 1885–87. About a hundred Japanese, both men and women, lived in a village that served as a model of traditional Japanese buildings, as well as a replication of everyday life. An advertisement placed in the *Illustrated London News* encouraged English men and women to visit the village:

Skilled Japanese artisans and workers (male and female) will illustrate the manners, customs, and art-industries of their country, attired in their national and picturesque costumes. Magnificently decorated and illuminated Buddhist temple. Five o'clock tea in the Japanese tea-house. Japanese Musical and other Entertainments. Every-day Life as in Japan³.

Although the detail about five o'clock tea in the Japanese tea-house has a humorous ring today, it should be noted in all seriousness that the exhibition was a great success, receiving over one million visitors during the two years of its existence.

Paris also became an important centre of Japanese culture, regarding both the presentation and reception of Japanese art and its inspiration of and imitation by contemporary European artists. At the Paris Exposition of 1867, a significant number of Japanese artworks and crafts were presented. Alongside these large ventures

2 Lambourne, Lionel. *Japonisme: Cultural Crossings Between Japan and the West*. New York: Phaidon Press 2005, p. 6.

3 McLaughlin, Joseph. “The ‘Japanese Village’ and the Metropolitan Construction of Modernity.” *Victorian Internationalisms*, No. 48, Nov. 2007, <https://www.erudit.org/fr/revues/ravon/2007-n-48-ravon1979/017441ar/> [12 March 2017].

were smaller enterprises, such as shops selling goods from Japan and galleries offering works of Japanese artists and craftsmen. The first art dealers, critics, and collectors of this art appeared, both Japanese, such as Tadamasa Hayashi or Iijima Hanjūrō, and European, such as Samuel Siegfried Bing, Philippe Burty, and Edmond de Goncourt, or the Polish collector and aficionado of Japanese art, Feliks “Manggha” Jasieński. All of these “victims of infection” with Japanese art expressed unabashed admiration for the country’s culture, through journalistic as well as artistic publications, while establishing galleries and magazines (e.g. *Le Japon artistique*) and publishing articles and books on Japanese culture, philosophy, and aesthetics.

Another kind of work, equally important for popularizing Japanese culture, was carried out by French and English cultural figures such as Felix Bracquemond, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, Vincent van Gogh, Christopher Dresser, and Edward William Godwin. Few of them visited Japan but their contact with the creations of this country sufficed to bring about their spiritual transformation. Vincent van Gogh expressed this freshness of Japanese art in an 1886 letter to his brother Theo, which can also serve as a summary of more than twenty years of Japanese-European contacts:

Just think of that; isn't it almost a new religion that these Japanese teach us, who are so simple and live in nature as if they themselves were flowers? And we wouldn't be able to study Japanese art, it seems to me, without becoming much happier and more cheerful, and it makes us return to nature, despite our education and our work in a world of convention⁴.

Regarding the items that appeared in Europe, the scope of interest in Japan was extremely wide. Europeans collected ceramics, military items, clothing, home furnishings, and *ukiyo-e* images. Artists also joined the group of collectors, along with the above-mentioned art dealers, critics, and a portion of the bourgeois society of that time. Considering the degree of fascination with this Far Eastern country, the quantity of Japanese items in Europe must have been enormous. The question naturally arises: how did this happen? The answer is a reflection on the internal situation of Japan, and thus on state protection of cultural goods.

Kanagawa jōyaku

In the first half of the seventeenth century, as a result of the decision of the shogun Tokugawa Iemitsu supported by Empress Meishō (1639), Japan was closed to the European countries and, later, to the United States. In this state of isolation, Japan, as

4 Gogh, Vincent van. *Letter to Theo van Gogh*. 23 Sept. or 24 Sept. 1888, Arles. <http://vangoghletters.org/vg/letters/let686/letter.html> [5 March 2017].

a *sakoku*, survived until the mid-nineteenth century when it came into contact with the Western world. However, the country was not completely closed to all contacts; one can cite a trade opening, entirely controlled by the shogun, that existed throughout the *sakoku* period. During this period, the European countries made many attempts to break Japan's isolation, but none succeeded. Change, imposed by military means, occurred only in the mid-nineteenth century.

The first treaty which opened Japan to Western influence was signed with the United States. Commodore Matthew C. Perry, under the threat of military force symbolized by the "black ships" (*kurofune*)⁶, oversaw the signing of a treaty of friendship and cooperation on the 31 March 1854. A breakthrough in the isolationist policies of Japan had been made. In the following years, similar treaties were signed with France, the Netherlands, Russia, and the United Kingdom. Japan became a part of the international community, and the efforts of its government and administration were directed towards eliminating educational, economic, and political differences. The treaties had profound and far-reaching consequences, as they led to the opening of Japan to and for the world. The policy of the Restoration, instituted by the government of Emperor Meiji, merits the highest admiration. Here, the extraordinary ability of the Japanese to adapt foreign patterns and solutions from almost every sphere of socio-economic life in the Western nations and to transfer them to their own country revealed itself for the first time.

In 1860, a diplomatic mission visited the United States to ratify the previously-signed Kanagawa Treaty. In 1862, Takenouchi Yasunori led the first diplomatic mission to Europe. Its objective was to ratify treaties and, at the same time, to delay the opening of Japan to the foreign exchange. Also, this goal was educational, consisting of acquaintance with the Western culture⁷. Within a year, the mission had visited France, the Netherlands, Prussia, Portugal, Russia, and the United Kingdom. A year later, another mission was sent from Japan to Europe, with France as the primary focus. This mission, led by Ikeda Nagaoki, was aimed at negotiating the opening of the port of Yokohama. These political missions were accompanied by a bilateral aura of cultural exoticism. The period of intensive meetings and political and commercial talks was also a time of intensive mutual learning.

One area of the Japanese culture needed no transfer of Western patterns for the achievement of a similar level of development; the situation here was reversed, and this area became an ideal, imitated by the fascinated Westerners. It was the Japanese

5 Sant, John Van. Mauch, Peter. Sugita, Yoneyuki. *Historical Dictionary of United States-Japan Relations*. Lanham: The Scarecrow Press, 2007, p. 222.

6 Ibidem, p. 54.

7 Ibidem, p. 79.

culture in its artistic form. It was at the same time a great paradox, manifesting itself in the “collision” of the two cultures, East and West. In parallel with its political opening to the world, Japan opened its culture. It was an opening without any restrictions, which, in a short time, led to the transfer of a considerable quantity of Japanese art and crafts to Europe. An important question naturally arises: how did it happen that such an enormous quantity of cultural goods was exported from Japan? Moreover, why were the Japanese authorities uninterested in this phenomenon and undisturbed by its magnitude?

Signed in 1854, the Japan–US Treaty of Peace and Amity consists of twelve articles, two of which, referring to trade, are of particular interest to us.

Article VI proclaimed:

If there be any other sort of goods wanted, or any business which shall require to be arranged, there shall be careful deliberation between the parties in order to settle such matters.

Article VII added:

It is agreed that ships of the United States resorting to the ports open to them shall be permitted to exchange gold and silver coin and articles of goods for other articles of goods, under such regulations as shall be temporarily established by the Japanese Government for that purpose. It is stipulated, however, that the ships of the United States shall be permitted to carry away whatever articles they are unwilling to exchange⁸.

None of the articles addresses the terms of export of artwork and crafts from Japan, or any reservations and restrictions placed on their trade. The only restrictions (natural, not legal) might have involved the ability to acquire suitable products on the Japanese side, and a lack of buyers on the European. In neither case were there any such problems. Hence, in several European countries, all the elements that constitute a well-developed art business were present: exhibitions, fairs, and galleries where buyers could select interesting works of art from a great number of available items.

Consequences of the treaty

Within a short time after its opening, the Japanese culture had captured the imagination and aesthetic taste of the Westerners. Art dealers, collectors, and critics, as a result of their high interest in Japanese works of art as new, fresh, highly valued products of this culture, contributed significantly to this phenomenon and exerted a significant impact on these changes. They collected ceramics, militaria, clothing

8 *Treaty of Kanagawa*, https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Treaty_of_Kanagawa [17 March 2017].

and home furnishings, fans, calligraphy, screens, dolls, netsuke, lacquerwork, narrative handscroll paintings, and sculptures. However, *ukiyo-e* prints achieved the greatest popularity. All of these elements became a source of inspiration for various groups of artists: Impressionist painters, artists and craftsmen of the Arts and Crafts Movement, and the artists of the Cubist, Secession, and Art Nouveau movements.

The depth of this fascination is shown by statistics referring to this period. Europeans and Americans interested in this culture accumulated several thousand to several tens of thousands of examples of this art in their collections. In aggregate, the quantity is difficult to estimate. Samuel Siegfried Bing possessed one of the largest collections in Europe, numbering over 50,000 woodblock prints. The Japanese merchant Hayashi Tadamasa brought 160,000 prints from Japan to France in the last decade of the nineteenth century. Art critics and artists such as Philippe Burty, Edmond de Goncourt, Edgar Degas, Vincent van Gogh and his brother Theo, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, and James McNeill Whistler and Frederick Richards Leyland also had their own collections. There were also collectors outside the main centers of contact with Japanese culture. In Poland, Feliks “Manggha” Jasieński possessed the largest collection, numbering about 20,000 pieces, including 6,500 *ukiyo-e* prints.

The Americans also created collections; the most important belonged to John Chandler Bancroft, William Sturgis Bigelow (who owned 4,000 Japanese paintings and more than 30,000 *ukiyo-e* prints), Ernest Francisco Fenollosa, Charles Lang Freer (who owned over 2,000 works of art and over 5,500 prints), Henry O. Havemeyer, Edward Sylvester Morse, and the artists Robert F. Blum, Samuel P. Isham (who owned 12,000 wood-block prints, including 4,000 by Hokusai alone), and J. Alden Weir. What Hayashi did for France and Europe in the context of Japanese art, Shugyō Hiromichi, who “stands out as a pioneer in introducing New Yorkers to the beauty of Japanese woodblock prints and illustrated books,”⁹ accomplished for the United States.

These private collections often, as a result of donations, became the foundations for the main parts of the public collections of the world’s major museums, such as the Louvre, the British Museum, the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, the Cincinnati Art Museum, the Smithsonian Institution, and the Worcester Art Museum. These museum collections number tens of thousands of works of art; the largest Boston collection numbers over 100,000 copies (the Bigelow donation alone included 40,000 prints). As Meech-Pekarik notes:

9 Meech-Pekarik, Julia. “Early Collectors of Japanese Prints and the Metropolitan Museum of Art.” *Metropolitan Museum Journal*, vol. 17, 1982, p. 107.

After the Meiji Restoration of 1868, when Japan was concentrating entirely on modernization, the earlier woodblock prints were apparently viewed as cheap export items. As a result, the largest and best collections of *ukiyo-e* ('pictures of the floating world') can today be found in the West¹⁰.

As art historians rightly note: "Today, there are ethical concerns about the great museums – the Louvre, the British Museum, and the MFA – all of which hoarded national treasures as prizes of war and acquisitions during an era of colonialism."¹¹ In this case, it is a question not of war but a form of socio-cultural colonialism.

All of this information points to an important question: how could it happen that so many works of art and artifacts were taken out of Japan in so short a period? The answer seems to be simple: no sufficient protection of national heritage existed. It took time to discern the country's needs and to organize appropriate agencies with proper laws for this particular purpose. The Japanese authorities were mainly interested in compensating for differences in technical development, and far less interested in securing and protecting the country's cultural heritage. Works of art were cheap and easily available from both poor temples and poor families. However, surprisingly, the lack of protection of works of art was not the result of a complete lack of awareness of the need to protect cultural goods.

In 1871 the Japanese Department of State issued a Plan for the Preservation of Ancient Artifacts to protect antiquities (*koki kyūbutsu* – antiques and relics). However, as William H. Coaldrake has written, the plan was unsuccessful because the Japanese were more interested in the radical Westernization of their country, adopting Western patterns uncritically¹². Secondly, the Japanese government allocated funds to protect ancient sanctuaries and temples, while neglecting, during the initial period, private property; "The law was limited to religious institutions, and the problem of privately owned art leaving the country continued."¹³ Similarly, two legal acts, the Ancient Temples and Shrines Preservation Laws (the *koshaji hozon hō*), were issued in 1897. They referred not to private works of art but to architectural works owned by religious institutions. Though these laws were not immediately effective, researchers point out that they were very modern¹⁴ and comparable to the laws of Europe-

¹⁰ Ibidem, p. 93.

¹¹ Giuliano, Charles. "Hokusai Makes Waves at the MFA." *Berkshire Fine Arts*, May 25, 2015, http://www.berkshirefinearts.com/05-25-2015_hokusai-makes-waves-at-the-mfa.htm [18 March 2017].

¹² Coaldrake, William Howard. *Architecture and Authority in Japan*. London-New York: Routledge, 1996, p. 249.

¹³ Mackay-Smith, Alexander IV. "Mission to preserve and to protect." *Japan Times*. Apr. 29, 2000, <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/culture/2000/04/29/arts/mission-to-preserve-and-protect/#.WQTHrvnyhPY> [10 March 2017].

¹⁴ Coaldrake, William Howard. op.cit., p. 249.

an countries such as England, France, or Greece¹⁵. At that time, at the end of the nineteenth century, a substantial change took place in the consciousness of the Japanese who began to perceive the value of their cultural heritage¹⁶. It is worth adding that a significant contribution to this transformation was made by Ernest Francisco Fenollosa, a lover and connoisseur of Japanese art and a lecturer at Tokyo Imperial University, who helped to create the legislation of 1897 and had a strong impact on the reform of the country's education.

A real change in the protection of cultural properties, both institutional and private, was made thirty years later. In 1929, the National Treasures Preservation Law (*kokuhō hozon hō*), which replaced the law from the end of the previous century, was passed. This law explicitly established the protection of all cultural property belonging to public and private institutions and individuals before its export from the country. In 1933 it was further strengthened by the Law Regarding the Preservation of Important Works of Fine Arts, which was the result of the worldwide economic crisis. By the outbreak of World War II, thousands of works of art and craft items were considered national treasures which prevented them from being sold and exported. In the post-war period, Japanese governments passed additional legal acts or amendments to existing acts, guided by the overriding interest in protecting the national heritage.

In 1950 the Cultural Asset Protection Act (*bunkazai hogo hō*) was announced, which expanded its range far beyond its earlier forerunners. The new law recognized Tangible Cultural Assets, Intangible Cultural Assets with such unique category as Living National Treasures,¹⁷ Folk Cultural Assets, Archaeological Cultural Assets, Historical Sites and Natural Monuments. No doubts this Cultural Asset Protection Act was "one of the most comprehensive cultural preservation laws in the world," as Mackay-Smith declared.¹⁷ The lack of such legal protection in the short nineteenth-century period resulted in the loss to Japanese culture of many priceless, unique works of art and craftsmanship. These facts belong, however, to the shared history of colonialism.

Invasion of objects

The contents expressed by words ending in *-ism* play the roles of keys, using which the philosophical spaces of meanings and senses are opened. The problem with these words, however, lies in the fact that over a long period of use, the keys lose the power to open

15 Edwards, Walter. "Japanese Archaeology and Cultural Properties Management: Prewar Ideology and Postwar Legacies." *A Companion to the anthropology of Japan*. Ed. Jennifer. Robertson. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2005, p. 36 – 37.

16 Henrichsen, Christoph. "Historical outline of conservation legislation in Japan." *Hozon: architectural and urban conservation in Japan*. Ed. Siegfried. Enders. Stuttgart/London: Edition Axel Menges, 1998, p. 12.

17 Mackay-Smith, Alexander IV. op. cit.

anything, thus becoming an encumbrance. Such words are explained by means of other fundamental concepts, such as tradition, heritage, or history, often with the addition of a community or social adjective. It was the state of affairs in the nineteenth century, when contacts with Japan were established.

Academism had lost its explanatory freshness and had become petrified, placing a burden on new artistic ideas significant enough to block their development. Change from within proved difficult. Help came from without, in the form of the “Japanese madness” that seized Europe in the second half of the nineteenth century. The products of Japanese culture, both arts, and crafts, upset the existing equilibrium, freeing the energy of artists and critics in European countries. For the vast majority of nineteenth-century artists, academism was natural, and the convictions derived from it were self-evident, functioning as mental habits. Critical self-knowledge in this situation was difficult. However, many were aware of this state: philosophers and artists, full of intellectual and creative anxiety, for whom the existing metaphors and concepts of Greek, Judaic, and Christian mythology constituted an obstacle to free and creative thought. John Locke’s metaphor of candlelight and sunlight, although used in a different context, serves to sharpen the point of these remarks. He stated that the candle that shines within us shines quite clearly for all our needs and that the discoveries we can make in this light should satisfy us. The nineteenth century showed that such light fails to illuminate either practical or spiritual needs with sufficient clarity, and therefore, it is impossible to agree with this view. The true servant of culture (not Locke’s) is disobedient and courageous; candlelight is not enough for him; he wants to unveil the light of the sun.

The flow of new and diverse products of Japanese craftsmanship into Europe was at the same time a flow of many new ideas which had been previously more sensed than discovered. Thus their appearance in the Western culture constituted a shock, almost an enlightenment when they were implemented in the form of the Japanese artworks. These works moved the imagination and emotions and influenced the behaviour and thinking of contemporary Europeans, thus suggesting that these three spheres of human life had previously been blocked by the ideas established in the Western culture. It turned out that, despite geographic and what appeared to be cultural distance, the migration of objects essentially meant the migration of ideas. Paradoxically, the technical and formal dissimilarity of these objects did not equate to philosophical or ideological differences. Nor did linguistic or national differences hinder their acceptance. One more aspect here is worth noting, one almost absent from the discussion concerning the meeting of different cultures. The novelty flowing from the Far East did not surprise audiences with its foreignness, which might have

been expected, but with the intelligibility and timeliness of the ideas contained in them. What, then, constituted the ideas of that time?

The novelty of Japanese products has charmed and enchanted Western audiences from the very beginning. Though different to the point of strangeness, costumes, hairstyles, and behaviours did not lead to aesthetic or moral problems; instead, these differences possessed extraordinary power of attraction. From the beginning, it is difficult to speak of cultural foreignness and incomprehensibility. Japanese foreignness proved fascinating for Western observers, and the meeting of cultures was experienced similarly on the Japanese side. Nothing would ever be the same; the world had changed, along with the way in which it was perceived. Fascinated observers, having succumbed to the influence of Japanese culture, transformed their vision and ways of thinking about it. Some of them carried out a re-evaluation of European art.

Foreignness, as the American researcher Benjamin Lee Whorf rightly pointed out, is transformed into a new and penetrating way of looking at things¹⁸. Earlier premonitions and searches take on real forms. As Beata Szymańska adds, “only that which is different is capable of showing us the specific nature of what is ours.”¹⁹ This process was at the same time an indication of the direction of individual searches resulting from a comparison of what was one’s own with what was foreign. What the majority of the society had failed to perceive, taking it for granted even though artists had sensed it, made an enormous impact by striking differences. These differences revealed Europeans to themselves, showing them new dimensions of art and culture. Differences of language did not prevent understanding; different contexts of practical life expressed similar spiritual needs, which were revealed in the comprehensible meanings and senses of their products. Customs, tastes, beliefs, or fashions were localisms, manifestations of practical ideals, unified by the common desires of people to discover the world, to express themselves, and to perfect themselves in practical, intellectual, and spiritual senses. Standards of foreignness were transformed into positively valued ideals. The Japanese criteria for perfection did not deviate from European imaginations and thus received a positive response in the sensitive minds of the West. “Their philosophical significance and historical influence can be understood only by contrast.”²⁰

What appeared in Europe at this time? Woodprints, painting, sculpture, fabrics (mainly silk), ceramics, wooden products, lacquerware, enamelware, bronze, and military objects. Women were delighted with the artistry of women’s products, such as

18 Whorf, Benjamin Lee. *Język, myśl i rzeczywistość* [Language, Thought, and Reality]. Trans. T. Hołówna. Warsaw: KR, 1982, p. 355.

19 Szymańska, Beata. *Kultury i porównania* [Culture and comparison]. Cracow: Universitas, 2003, p. 35.

20 Lovejoy, Arthur O. *The Great Chain of Being*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1964, see Introduction.

kimonos, belts (*obi*), hairpieces (*kōgai*), combs (*kushi*) with intricate and beautiful ornamentation, fans, boxes and cases for calligraphy (*suzuribako*) or medicines (*inrō*). These were used by women in Japan – by those who could afford them, of course, i.e., geishas and courtesans who were simultaneously subject to and creators of fashion. In addition to their above-mentioned aesthetic qualities and traditional aesthetics in the European sense, they specifically embodied the Japanese aesthetic of touch (*l'esthétique du touché*), as described early on, with admirable accuracy, by Ernest Chesneau in his article “*Le Japon à Paris*”: “The forms of the objects they produce are calculated in a sophisticated manner, so as to awaken and caress the finesse of touch.” These exquisite details, such as those mentioned above, provoke the “caress of the hand,” continued Chesneau, because the fantasy of Japanese artists is “inexhaustible” and because they are “made to exactly match the shape of the hand and fingers.”²¹ It is not surprising, therefore, that all of these items were valuable and appreciated and became objects of desire for sensitive connoisseurs and specialist collectors.

What characterized Japanese artworks, and what differentiated them from European? Moreover, what did Japanese art bring to Europe? An apt characterization was presented by the Polish collector and expert on Japanese art, Feliks “Manggha” Jasieński: “Subtle gems, strange details; grace, elegance, a sunny radiance (...). Everything is present in this art: thought, soul, expression, broad momentum, horror, and melancholy.”²² He especially appreciated two Japanese artists, Katsushika Hokusai and Utagawa Hiroshige. In his opinion, “[t]hese two artists, through acquainting European artists with their own way of looking at and recreating nature, caused a revolution in nineteenth-century European landscape painting.”²³ Their influence, however, was broader and more profound, corresponding to the properties of this art, in which crafts were also unhesitatingly included. Several characteristic features, different from the European understanding of space, representations of nature, composition, completion of a picture, and brushwork, were discovered in the woodcuts of the passing world (*ukiyo-e*), stencils for dying textiles (*katagami*), paintings of birds and flowers (*kachō-ga*), kimonos, masks, and illustrated books (*ehon*).

21 Chesneau, Ernest. “Le Japon à Paris.” *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, 1.IX. 1878, p. 386; quote for: Kluczevska-Wójcik, Agnieszka, “Motywy japońskie w europejskim i amerykańskim rzemiośle artystycznym końca XIX wieku – źródła, wzory, interpretacje.” *Sztuka Japonii. Studia*. Ed. idem, J. Malinowski Jerzy, Warsaw 2009, p. 90.

22 Jasieński, Feliks. “Wystawa drzeworytów japońskich” [Exhibition of Japanese woodcuts], *Chimera* 1901, I, no 1 (), p. 349.

23 Jasieński, Feliks “Manggha”. *Promenades à travers le monde, l’art et les idées*, Paris: Fiszer 1901. See MiodońskaBrooks, Ewa and CieślaKorytowska, Maria. *Feliks Jasieński i jego Manggha* [Feliks Jasieński and his Manggha], Cracow: Universitas 1992, p. 351.

Japanese ceramics also contained many features that none would have dared to include earlier within the set of artistic and aesthetic values, such as irregularity (expressed as an oppositional juxtaposition of asymmetry and particular harmony), a patina of time and even a suggestion of wear, delicate modelling and ornamentation, simple forms, natural materials, combining traditional local techniques with Japanese methods learned in the course of the exchange of knowledge and experience between designers and artists. The feature of naturalness in reference to representations of nature and depictions of culture was especially emphasized. One synonym of naturalness was the simplicity of order, which was identified with natural beauty. In his article on Japan in Paris, Chesneau wrote:

The characteristic features [of Japanese art] are asymmetry, style, colour, and above all invention, imagination transforming nature, wisely learned, deeply studied, so as to bend it to the expressive needs of art; let us recall the extremely accurate sense of colour contrasts, thanks to which Japanese artists do not retreat from any intensity of effect; (...) their inexhaustible fertility, the ease with which they change the best-known motifs into infinity, giving them the spirit, grace, and taste of something completely unexpected²⁴.

In the nineteenth century, the West faced the migration of objects expressing the specific philosophy according to which they had been created, and the resulting ideas and values. It was not a philosophy of aggression; on the contrary, it expressed ideals, principles, and norms of peace and self-control, coexistence, and cooperation, mindfulness and sensitivity, generally respecting the world of nature and the world of culture. European culture has developed in accordance with the direction indicated by Japanese philosophy and art. Though this conclusion is surprising, it is difficult to reject it, even in the name of the most profound Eurocentrism. A separate issue, to be considered elsewhere, involves two questions or problems. First, to what extent did this represent authentic Japan, and to what extent and in what way was it modified and reduced, in line with the expectations and imaginations of Europeans, to the form of Japonism? And, secondly, how did this Japanese art, following its assimilation, influence the development of European art?

²⁴ Chesneau, Ernest. *op. cit.*, p. 90.

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Summary

Contacts between nations and countries have always contributed to mutual understanding between peoples and their cultures and customs. It is true of contacts between Japan and the Western world. The nineteenth century was a breakthrough for Japan, although its evaluation is still the subject of discussion. The following remarks are devoted to the encounter of these two cultures following the Kanagawa Treaty from the perspective of the protection of cultural heritage. The different histories of Japan and the Western countries created different cultural and national identities, resulting in different understandings of works of art and craft items, and hence the different status of each side's sense of values: artistic, cultural, and national. It is one of the important reasons the Japanese forfeited so many items representative of their arts and culture.